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THE SANDMAN™

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the DOLL'S HOUSE part 7

GAIMAN • DRINGENBERG • JONES

...AND I'M A WHAT?

You are a vortex of Dream, Rose Walker.

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KAREN BERGER, EDITOR • CREATED BY GAIMAN, KIETH & DRINGENBERG

AND YOU'RE SAYING THAT BECAUSE I'M THIS--THIS *VORTEX*--WHATEVER THE HELL *THAT* MEANS--YOU'RE GOING TO *KILL* ME?

IS *THAT* WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?

Yes. That is what I am saying.

LOST HEARTS

CONVERSION BY WILDSTORM

YOU'RE KIDDING, AREN'T YOU?

I MEAN, *YOU SAVED* MY *LIFE*. IN THAT CRAZY HOTEL, WITH THAT CRAZY FAT GUY, YOU SAVED MY *LIFE*. AND NOW YOU WANT TO KILL ME.

SO IT'S A JOKE. YES?

NO.

NO, YOU REALLY AREN'T JOKING. YOU WANT TO KILL ME.

I CAN'T BELIEVE I...

YOU KNOW, FOR A SECOND THERE I WAS REALLY WORRIED.

BUT THIS IS JUST A *DREAM*. SO WHAT AM I WORRIED ABOUT?

SOONER OR LATER I'LL WAKE UP. THEN I'LL GO DOWNSTAIRS AND TELL HAL ABOUT THIS CRAZY DREAM I HAD, AND HE'LL LAUGH HIMSELF *SICK*.

WE BOTH WILL.

Rose, I am sorry, but you are mistaken.

You are right. This is a dream. But not a dream from which you will waken.

Not now. Not ever.

Rose...

NO. IT'S OKAY. I BELIEVE YOU. I'D BE KIDDING MYSELF IF I TRIED TO PRETEND THIS WASN'T HAPPENING.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT, BUT I BELIEVE IT.

JUST TELL ME ONE THING.

What would that be?

WHY ME?

IT ALL SEEMS UNFAMILIAR--THE DREAMING HAS ALTERED IN THE LAST FIFTY YEARS, MATTHEW.

YEAH? KAARK, I WOULDN'T KNOW.

WE MUST HURRY, MATTHEW.

YOU THINK YOU CAN STOP HIM HURTING THE GIRL, IS THAT IT?

NO, I DON'T THINK I CAN.

HUH? THEN WHY ARE WE DOING THIS? I'D HATE TO MAKE THE CHIEF ANGRY...

I DON'T THINK I CAN HELP. BUT I CAN HOPE, AND I CAN PRAY.

AND BY THE BY, I AM SURE OUR LORD WILL BE ANGRY ENOUGH WITH ME ALREADY, FOR DESERTING THE DREAMING.

NOTHING I CAN DO WILL MAKE IT WORSE.

SO, YOU WERE A BIG SHOT IN THE DREAM-WORLD IN THE OLD DAYS.

FIDDLER'S GREEN. WEIRD NAME. WHO WERE YOU?

WHO?

MY DEAR BIRD, YOU SEEM TO BE LABORING UNDER A MISAPPREHENSION.

FIDDLER'S GREEN IS NOT A WHO. IT'S A WHERE.

I WAS NOT A PERSON, MATTHEW. I WAS A PLACE.

LET US MAKE HASTE, FRIEND RAVEN. IT IS GETTING COLDER. WE ARE CLOSE TO THEM NOW.

Once in every era, there is a vortex. Even I do not know why...

A mortal who, briefly, becomes... the center... of the dreaming.

The vortex, by its nature, destroys the barriers between dreaming minds; destroys the ordered chaos of the Dreaming...

Until the myriad dreamers are caught in one huge dream...

Until all the dreams are one. Then the vortex collapses in upon itself.

And then it is gone.

It takes the minds of the dreamers with it; it damages the Dreaming beyond repair.

It leaves nothing but darkness.

It is one of my functions to prevent this from occurring again.

AGAIN?

It will never happen again.

It happened once...

A world was lost, Rose Walker. Aeons ago, and half a universe away.

I... failed in my duty. A whole world perished.

BUT--BUT IF YOU'RE LIKE THE *KING* OF THIS WHOLE PLACE, CAN'T YOU JUST, I DON'T KNOW, *MAGIC* WHATEVER THIS IS OUT OF ME?

I DON'T KNOW. JUST STOP IT HAPPENING...

I am the Lord of this Realm, and my wishes are paramount. But I am not omnipotent.

You are of the living, Rose Walker, and you are a vortex. Only when the vortex is dead is the Dreaming safe.

Death is not always a bad thing, Rose...

You could stay here in the dreamworld. Some mortals are given that option. My raven, Matthew, was once a mortal man.

I DON'T WANT TO DIE.

I... I am sorry, Rose.

HOOM! ROSE WALKER! ARE YOU THERE?

GILBERT!

GILBERT! THANK GOD YOU'RE HERE! THIS MAN, HE, HE SAYS HE'S GOING TO KILL ME, HE--

I KNOW, ROSE WALKER.

Fiddler's Green.

Why did you leave?

I relied on you. I trusted you. You were so steady.

You were the heart of the dreaming.

I LEFT BECAUSE I WAS CURIOUS. AND BECAUSE I WAS TIRED. LIFE AS A HUMAN CONTAINS SUBSTANCE I NEVER DREAMED OF IN THE DREAMING, LORD.

THE LITTLE VICTORIES, AND THE TINY DEFEATS. I HAD MY REASONS.

BUT THAT IS OF NO IMPORTANCE. THIS GIRL : ROSE WALKER.

LORD, I OFFER MY LIFE FOR HERS.

That is not an option.

The girl must die that the Dreaming may survive.

I am sorry...

" I'M SORRY, MIRANDA...

"I DON'T THINK I'VE BEEN A... VERY GOOD MOTHER...

DON'T THINK ABOUT IT, UNITY. MOTHER.

EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE JUST FINE.

I... I THINK I'M GOING TO... HAVE TO SLEEP NOW.

UNITY KINKAID FINDS IT HARDER AND HARDER TO STAY ALIVE.

LIFE IS SO...

UNITY HEARS A VOICE, HER OWN VOICE, AND IT WHISPERS TO HER IN THE DARKNESS.

THE VOICE WHISPERS TO HER OF HER LIFE BEFORE THE LONG SLEEP. WHISPERS CHILDHOOD DREAMS OF A TALL, DARK MAN, WHOSE EYES DANCED LIKE TWIN STARS IN HER HEAD.

WHISPERS THE TRUTH.

AND THEN SHE GIVES IN TO SLEEP, HER BREATH SHALLOW AND HALT. DYING, IN A WORLD SHE FINALLY UNDERSTANDS...

UNITY DREAMS.

GILBERT?

LISTEN, ISN'T THERE *ANYTHING* WE CAN DO TO STOP HIM?

No. No, there is nothing he can do.

Fiddler's Green--I cannot find it in my heart to punish you for leaving. Not now.

However, it is time to take up your appointed position once again.

UH, SAY, MISS WALKER. TAKE IT FROM ME--DEATH ISN'T *THAT* BAD. YOU GET USED TO IT. *I* DID.

I WASN'T HAVING MUCH OF A *LIFE*, MIND YOU.

Say goodbye

I MUST APOLOGIZE TO YOU, MISS WALKER. APOLOGIZE FOR NOT BEING A VERY GOOD HUMAN BEING.

NOT EVEN A VERY GOOD *COPY* OF A HUMAN, PERHAPS I SHOULD SAY.

AND NOW, WHEN YOU NEED ME MOST, IT SEEMS I HAVE FAILED YOU.

JUST SHUT UP AND SAY GOOD-BYE, GILBERT, OR I'M GOING TO START CRYING...

...AND I'M NOT GOING TO GIVE HIM THAT SATISFACTION.

FAREWELL, MY DEAR.

YOU WERE THE BEST THING ABOUT BEING HUMAN.

AFTER YOUR DEATH, IF YOU DO STAY IN THE DREAMING, THEN VISIT ME.

WALK IN MY MEADOWS, AND MY GREEN GLADES.

REST BENEATH MY TREES.

FIDDLER'S GREEN, HUH?

NICE PLACE.

I am sorry, Rose. There is nothing personal about this. We all have responsibilities, and this is one of mine.

I am sorry.

FORCHRISSAKES! LOOK, JUST DO IT. STOP FRIGGIN' APOLOGIZING AND JUST DO WHATEVER YOU'RE GOING TO DO.

OKAY? JUST DO IT.

STOP THAT!

ROSE ISN'T GOING TO DIE TONIGHT.

I AM.

HELLO ROSE.

UM, HELLO. DO I *KNOW* YOU?

OH, I DON'T *LOOK* LIKE THIS ANYMORE, DO I? IT'S FUNNY, THE THINGS YOU FORGET.

I'M YOUR GRANDMOTHER, ROSE. I'M *UNITY.*

WHAT A *WONDERFUL* PLACE.

YEAH. IT WAS A FRIEND OF MINE.

NO. DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME? YOUR BUSINESS IS WITH *ME*, NOT HER.

Rose is the Vortex...

I know who you are, Unity Kinkaid, but I require you to leave this place. I have business to attend to with this woman.

PERHAPS. BUT I SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE VORTEX. IF YOU HAD NOT BEEN IMPRISONED AWAY FROM THE DREAMING, I *WOULD* HAVE BEEN.

I do not understand--

OF COURSE YOU DON'T. YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY NOT VERY BRIGHT, BUT I SHOULDN'T LET IT BOTHER YOU.

GRANDDAUGHTER, COME HERE.

ROSE, I ONCE GAVE YOU A RING. I WANT YOU TO REACH INSIDE YOURSELF, AND GIVE ME *WHATEVER* IT IS THAT MAKES *YOU* THE VORTEX.

GIVE ME YOUR HEART.

MY...HEART?

ROSE--I'M *DYING*. WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME. YOU'RE *DREAMING*. ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE. JUST DO IT.

THIS...?

THANK YOU, ROSE.

I AM THE VORTEX NOW, DREAM KING. AS I SHOULD HAVE BEEN SO *MANY* YEARS AGO.

I AM THE VORTEX. AND I AM--

AAH!

WHAT...WHAT HAPPENED?

You died.

Let me help you up.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS. I'M SORRY.

ARE YOU *STILL* GOING TO KILL ME?

There is no need, Rose Walker. There is much here that I do not understand, but the vortex has gone.

Leave this place, child.

I will bring your brother back from the shores of dream. He will return to consciousness in the morning.

View it as a gift from me to you, Rose.

Your family has suffered enough.

Goodbye, Rose Walker.

"And then she woke up."

That was six months ago.

What's happened since?

I got a letter from Hal, the other week.

Hal's selling his house, moving out west. Reading between the lines, I think he's met someone, but he didn't actually come out and say it.

He said that Ken and Barbie split. Ken got himself a new partner, who looks exactly like a younger Barbie, while Barbie's gone sort of seriously weird.

Hal didn't give me any details; she's gone to stay with some friends in Manhattan.

The Spider Women are buying the house from Hal. He said Zelda actually spoke to him the other day.

No one's seen Gilbert since...

EMPIRE OF THE SENSELESS

SLEEPING IN FLAME

We're living in a big house Mom bought, just outside Seattle, where she grew up.

We've got more money than you'd believe. Grandma Unity was richer than anyone I've ever known. Weird, huh? All that money, and she never even had a life.

SNIP

SNIP

SNIP

She...

Okay.

I haven't been out of my room (except to eat, preferably late at night when Mom and Jed are asleep) since we moved here, months ago.

I don't go out much.

Be honest, Rosalita. Be honest. No one else is ever going to read this.

I've been reading, playing records, sometimes just sitting, staring into space. Writing this diary, or whatever it is.

Thinking.

A year ago my best friend died. Her name was Judy. She was killed -- or perhaps she killed herself -- in some kind of massacre, in a small-town diner.

She phoned me on the day she died -- she'd just split up with her girlfriend, Donna, and she was in rough shape.

I think about Judy a lot.

I wish I could talk to her about this stuff. Except for Gilbert, she was the smartest person I ever met. But I can't talk to either of them...

Not any more.

Six months ago I had a really weird dream. That was the night that Unity died, and Jed got better.

If it was true, my dream (and lots of it is sort of hazy, lots of it doesn't seem to make sense any more, although I'm sure it did at the time), then...

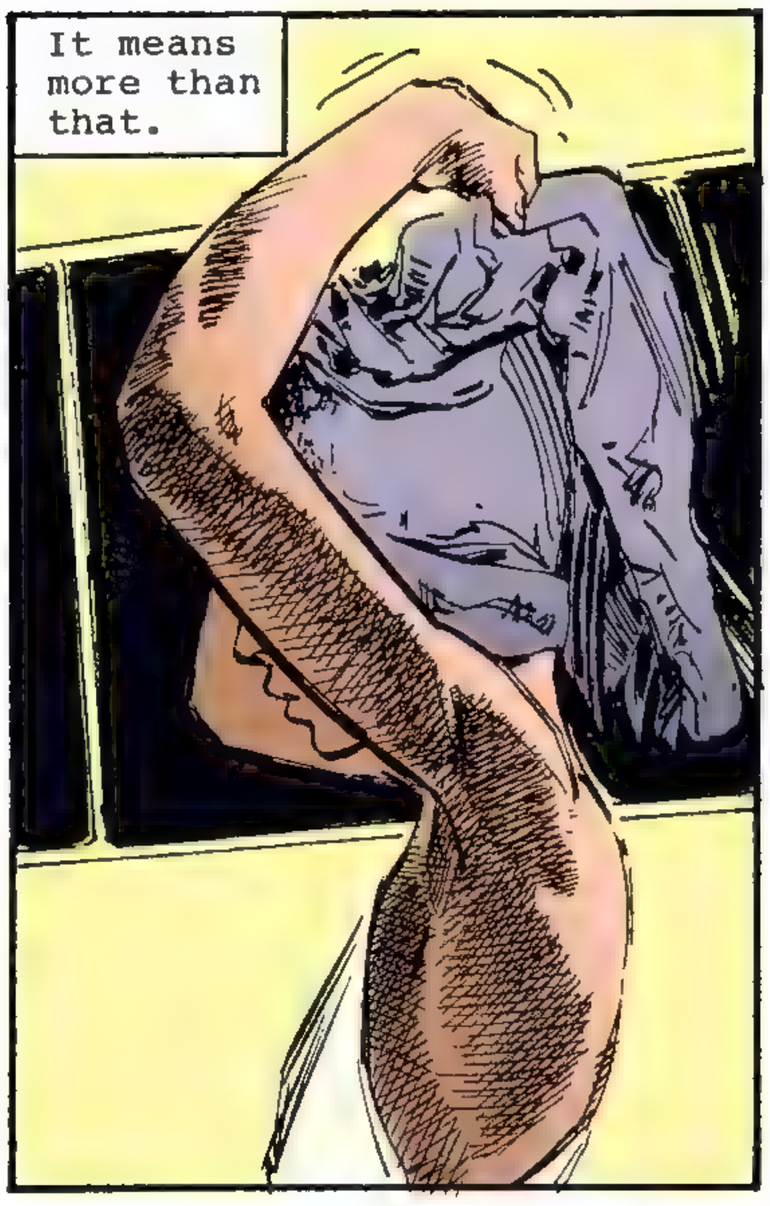
then...

Then nothing makes any sense.

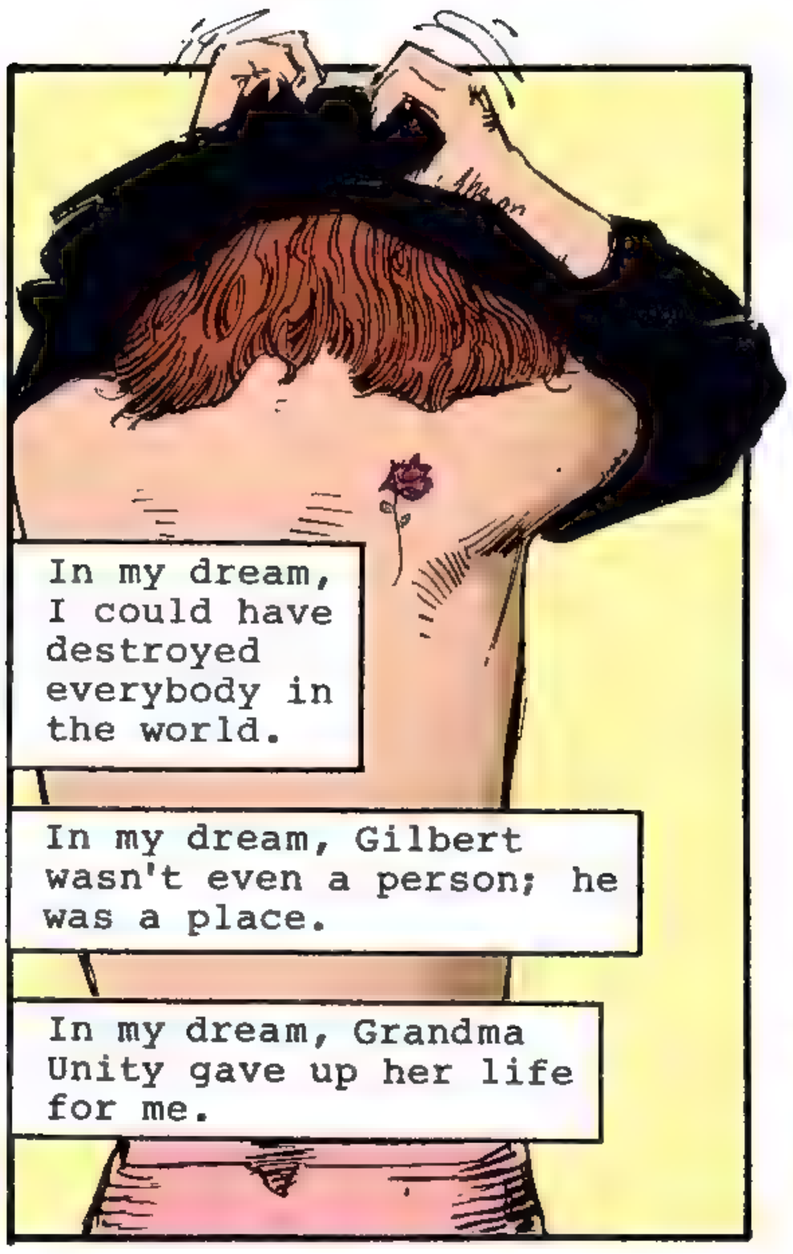
SIX SLAIN IN DINER OF DEATH RIDDLE

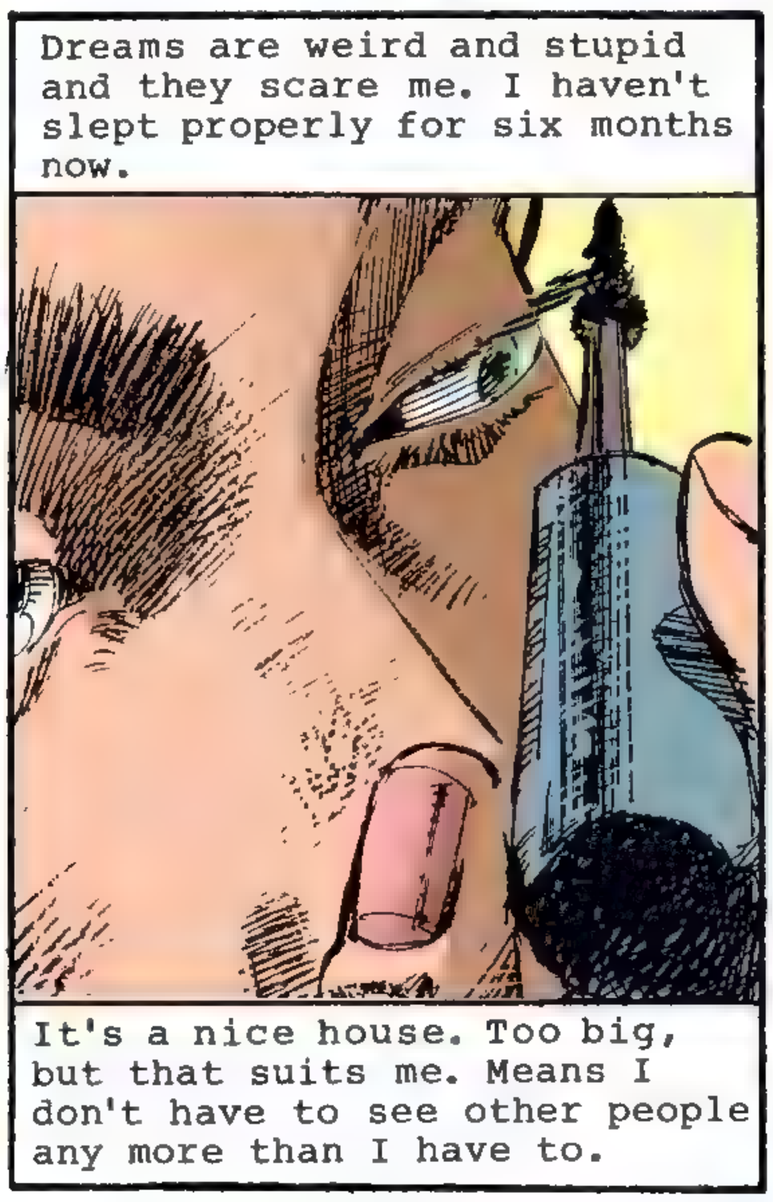
If my dream was true, then everything we know, everything we think we know is a lie.

It means the world's about as solid and as reliable as a layer of scum on the top of a well of black water which goes down forever, and there are things in the depths that I don't even want to think about.

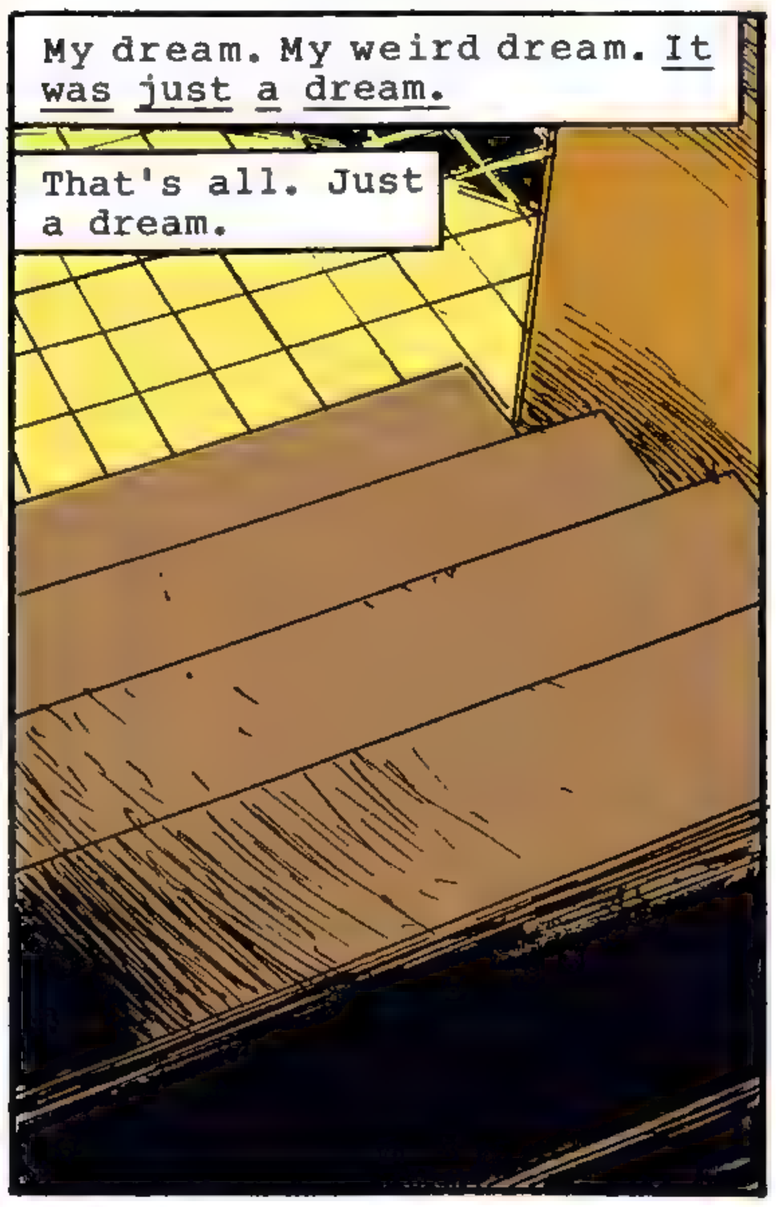


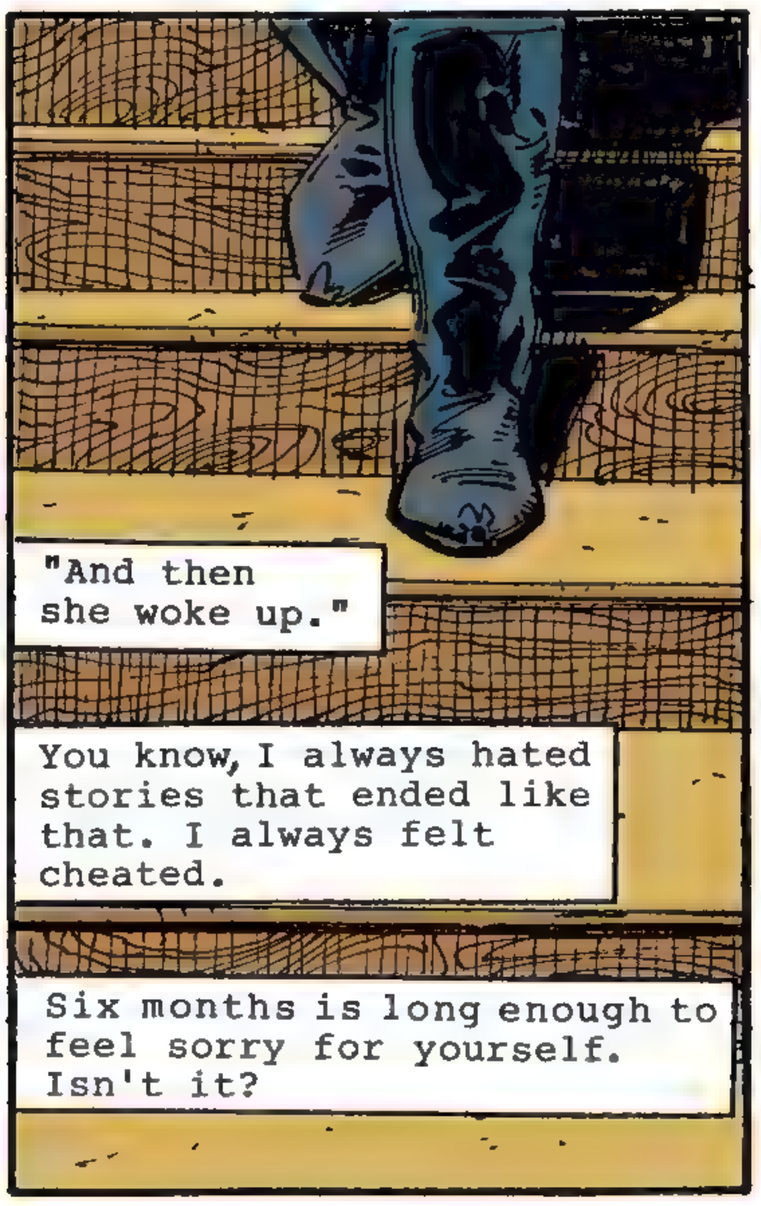
It means that we're just dolls. We don't have a clue what's really going down, we just kid ourselves that we're in control of our lives **while a paper's** thickness away things that would drive us mad if we thought about them for too long play with us, and move us around from room to room, and put us away at night when they're tired, or bored.


In my dream, I could have destroyed everybody in the world.
In my dream, Gilbert wasn't even a person; he was a place.
In my dream, Grandma Unity gave up her life for me.


Dreams are weird and stupid and they scare me. I haven't slept properly for six months now.
It's a nice house. Too big, but that suits me. Means I don't have to see other people any more than I have to.

That's my story.
Okay.
It's even got a happy ending: Jed and Rose and their mother were finally reunited, and they all lived together in a big old house.




"And then she woke up."
You know, I always hated stories that ended like that. I always felt cheated.
Six months is long enough to feel sorry for yourself. Isn't it?

You can't feel cheated forever.

HELLO, STRANGER.

HI, ROSE.

UM. HI.

YOUR HAIR LOOKS NICE. *REAL* NICE.

YEAH. THANKS. I WAS SICK OF IT THE OLD WAY.

SO, UH... WHAT'S THE OCCASION?

I DON'T KNOW. REJOINING THE HUMAN RACE, I SUPPOSE. I CAN'T SIT UP THERE *FOREVER*.

I THOUGHT MAYBE I'D GET SOME KIND OF JOB, OR MAYBE DO SOME TRAVELING. HUNT DOWN SOME OLD FRIENDS.

THAT'S A GOOD IDEA. I-- WE'VE BEEN WORRIED ABOUT YOU.

MM. SORRY.

I...

I FOUND A *FOX'S* DEN IN THE WOODS. WITH *CUBS*. I CAN *SHOW* IT TO YOU -- IF YOU WANT.

YEAH. I'D *LIKE* THAT.

"And then she woke up."

I suppose there are worse endings.

Desire? I stand in my Gallery, and I hold your Sigil.

Talk to me.

WHY, SWEET DREAM, THIS *IS* A SURPRISE-- ALMOST AN *EVENT*, I MIGHT SAY--

YOU ARE--?

OH, BUT OF COURSE. YOU KNOW YOU ARE *ALWAYS* WELCOME IN MY...

Good.

I'm coming through.

...CHAMBERS.

IT'S, UM, *LOVELY* TO SEE YOU. CAN I GET YOU ANYTHING YOU *DESIRE*?

My sibling, I require nothing from you, save some answers.

I have been thinking about certain events of the last year. And I have arrived at some unpleasant conciusions.

Unity Kinkaid should have been the dream vortex of this era. Yet she wasn't.

The vortex was instead transmitted along her genetic line to her grand-daughter, Rose Walker.

This is unprecedented in my experience.

Someone has been meddling in my affairs, Desire. And this has your stink about it.

ARE YOU *ACCUSING ME* OF *INTERFERING* IN ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE FAMILY'S *DOMAIN*?

Obviously that is exactly what I am doing. And I am accusing you of more than that.

Desire--who was Rose's grandfather? Who fathered her mother on sleeping Unity, fifty years ago?

...WAS I *THAT* OBVIOUS?

No. No, you covered your tracks remarkably well.

What did you truly intend, Desire?

Was I to take the life of one of our blood, with all that would entail? Or was it more devious than that?

DOES IT MATTER, BIG BROTHER? IT DIDN'T WORK.

Desire, if you were not of my kin...

BUT I AM.

Yes, you are.

Desire, listen to me carefully.

Remember this.

We of the endless are the servants of the living--we are NOT their masters.

WE exist because they know, deep in their hearts, that we exist.

When the last living thing has left this universe, then our task will be done.

And we do not manipulate them.

If anything, they manipulate us.

I--I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

We are their toys. Their dolls, if you will.

And you--and Despair, and even poor Délirium--should remember that.

I am afraid that you don't.

Very well. I shall tell you something that you WILL understand, sister-brother.

Mess with me or mine again, and I will FORGET that you are family, Desire.

Do you believe yourself strong enough to stand against ME? Against DEATH? Against DESTINY?

NO.

Remember that, sibling, the next time you feel inspired to interfere in my affairs.

Just remember.

AND DESIRE WALKS THE CHAMBERS OF ITS HEART.

IT WALKS THE THRESHOLD, ITS CITADEL AND ITS PROTECTION; AND DESIRE WONDERS:

WHAT DID HE MEAN? THAT *WE* ARE *THEIR* TOYS?

HUMAN BEINGS ARE THE CREATURES OF DESIRE. THEY TWIST AND BEND AS I REQUIRE IT.

IF I THOUGHT OTHERWISE, I WOULD CRACK, LIKE DELIRIUM; OR I WOULD ABANDON MY REALM, LIKE *OUR* LOST BROTHER.

POOR DREAM...

I *REALLY* GOT UNDER HIS SKIN *THIS* TIME.

AND DESIRE SMILES, AND FORGETS, FOR DESIRE IS A CREATURE OF THE MOMENT.

AND DESIRE WALKS THE ENDLESS PATHWAYS OF ITS BODY, CERTAIN THAT HE, OR SHE, OR IT, IS IN SOLE AND ONLY CONTROL OF ITS DESTINY.

THE ONLY INHABITANT OF THE TWILIGHT REALM OF DESIRE; AND IT FEELS NOTHING LIKE A DOLL.

NOTHING LIKE A DOLL AT ALL.

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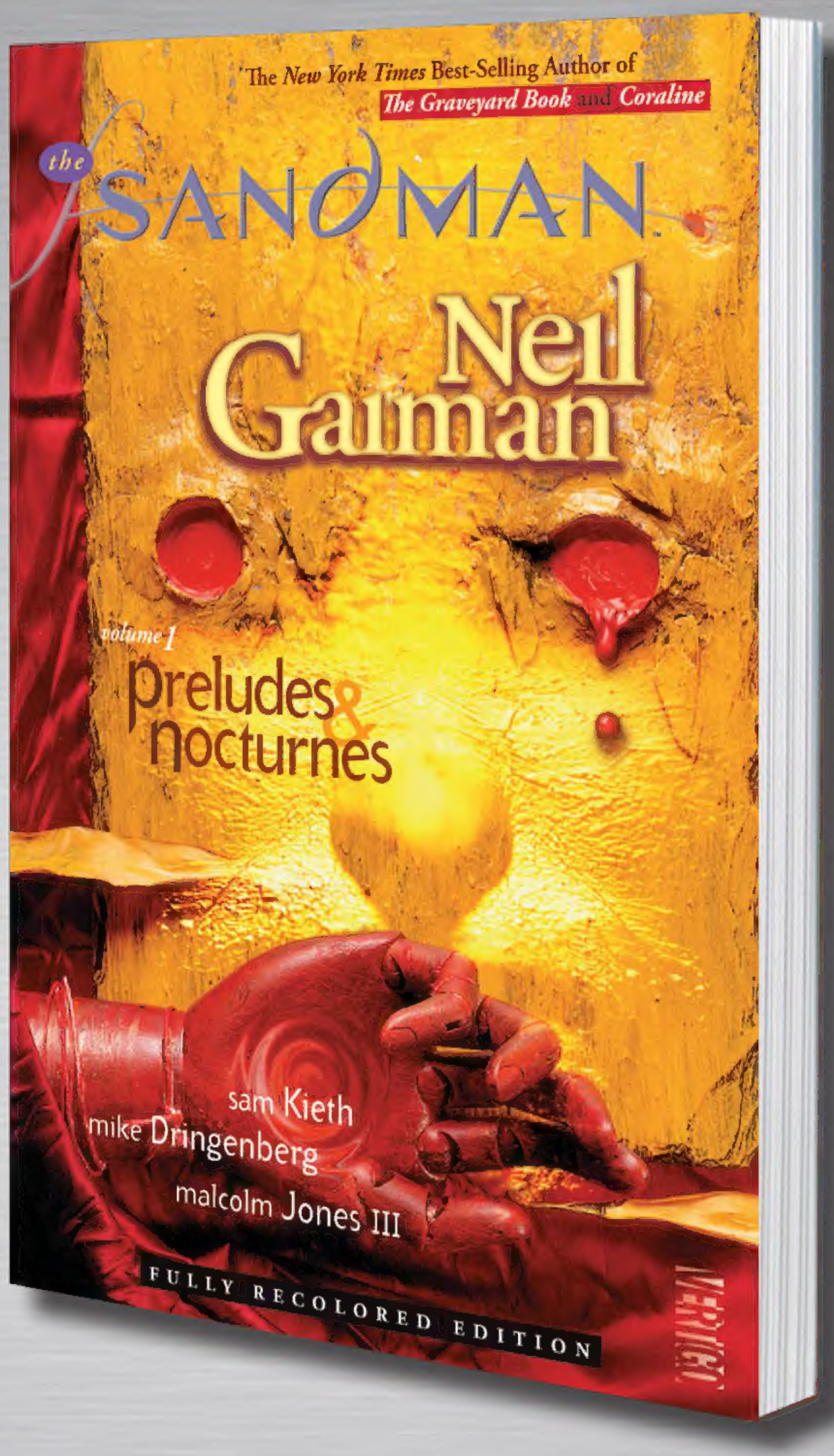

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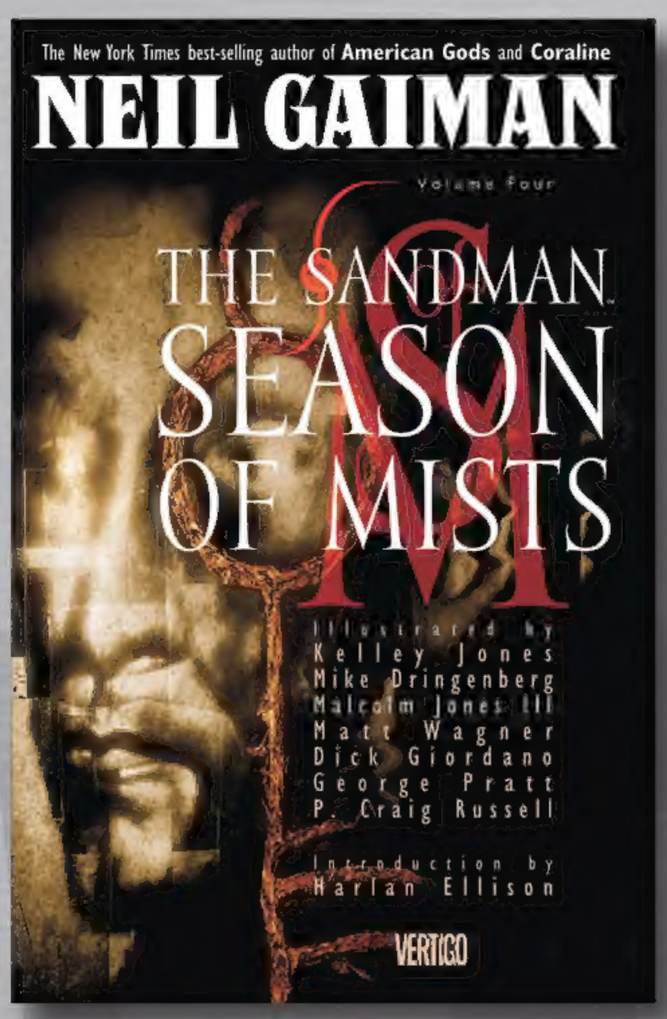
SEASON OF MISTS



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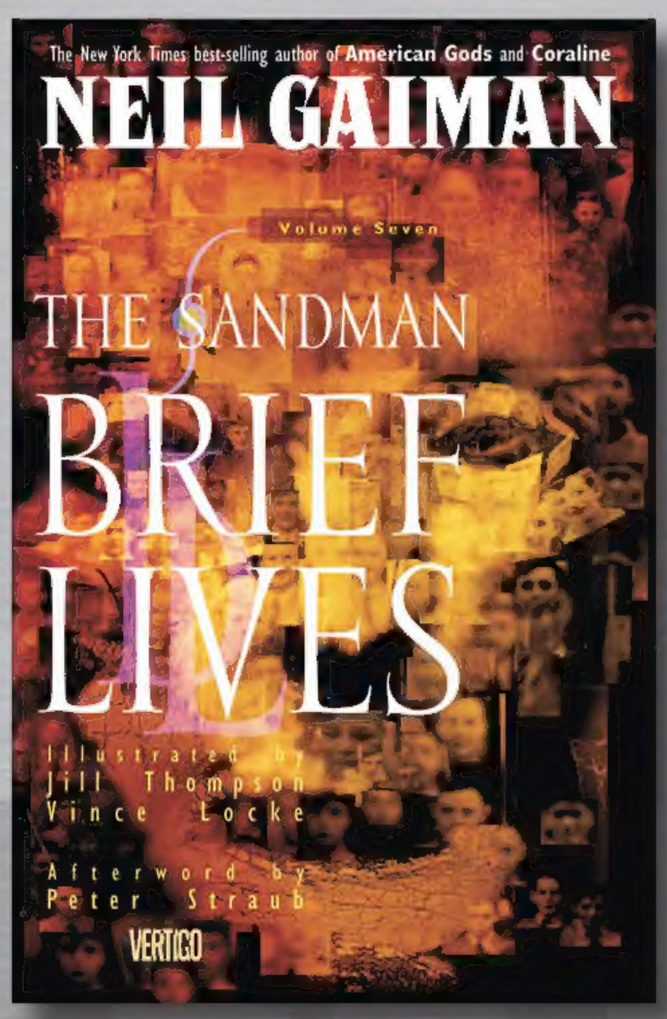

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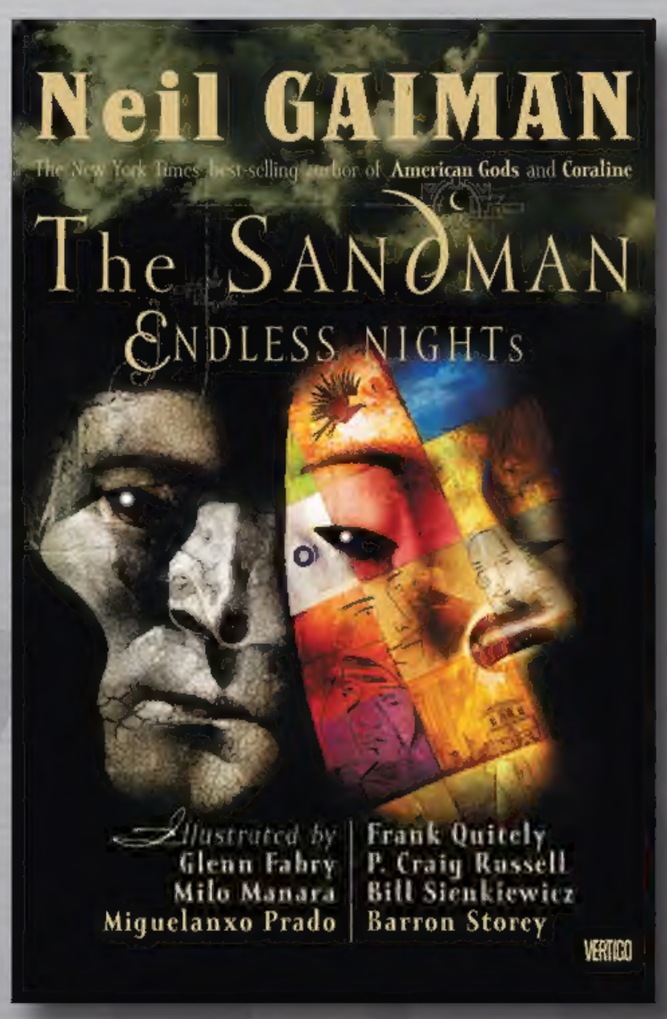

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